



# News Release

For immediate release: September 23, 2021

(21-206)

Media contact: [DOH Communications](#)

Public inquiries: State COVID-19 Assistance Hotline, 1-800-525-0127

## **COVID-19 transmission increasing; future hospital admissions and occupancy uncertain**

*‘Current surge of patients overwhelming our hospitals’ says state’s top epidemiologist*

**OLYMPIA** – The latest [COVID-19 modeling and surveillance situation report](#) from the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) shows the majority of counties now have case rates above 500 per 100,000. Washington is likely to see continued high levels of cases and hospital admissions, with increasing deaths.

Report findings include:

- **COVID-19 prevalence is at a new high.** The current best estimate of prevalence is 0.94%, or about 1 in every 106 Washingtonians. The previous reported high was 0.64% in August 2021, or about 1 in every 156 Washingtonians. About 39% of the population remains susceptible to COVID-19 infection.
- **Transmission continues to increase, but at a slower rate.** On Sep. 2, the best estimate of the effective reproductive number (Re, which tells us how many new people each COVID-19 case will infect) was 1.14. On Aug. 6, this estimate was 1.49. A reproductive number above one means that cases will continue to increase. To see cases decline, the reproductive number needs to stay well below 1.0 for a substantial amount of time.
- **COVID-19 deaths are increasing.** The seven-day rolling average of deaths has increased rapidly, from 5-10 deaths per day in July to 27 per day by the end of August.
- **Hospital admissions and occupancy for COVID-19 are still very high.** After a peak of 190 daily admissions (seven-day rolling average) at the end of August, the current

average has declined only slightly to 186. Both admissions and occupancy remain at very high levels. Although some recent declines are apparent as of September 18, current occupancy levels still far exceed those observed during the previous highs of winter 2020.

- **Hospital projections indicate high levels of admissions and occupancy for COVID-19 are likely to persist through the fall.** The projections pose two scenarios based on increasing rates of transmission, one with a lower or “modest” rate, and another with a higher or “moderate” rate. Under these scenarios, hospital admissions by the end of December could decrease, or they could increase to between 141 and 240 admissions daily. The number of beds occupied through December could decrease, or they could increase to between 1100 and 2000 beds per day.

“What this tells us is that our individual choices and behaviors today are going to determine whether or not our friends and families will have full access to health care in the near future, for any medical need, not just COVID,” said Scott Lindquist, MD, MPH, state epidemiologist for communicable diseases. “The current surge of patients is overwhelming our hospitals. With school in session and flu season almost here, our best option for getting through the surge is to wear our masks and get vaccinated.”

Washington’s rate of immunity would be enough to control hospital admissions and occupancy given a lower or “modest” increase in transmission. Under higher or “moderate” transmission, however, the rate of immunity would not be enough, and hospital admission and occupancy would increase, especially among the estimated 39% of the population susceptible to infection. Vaccinations remain highly effective at protecting against hospitalization. The best way to increase immunity and slow down transmission are to [get vaccinated](#) and [wear face coverings](#) in indoor or crowded public places.

More COVID-19 data can be found on the [DOH data dashboard](#).

The [DOH website](#) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. [Find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#). Sign up for the DOH blog, [Public Health Connection](#).